

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Is rule of law expiring?

By Nat Hentoff

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With President Barack Obama urgently explaining to us why he must remain in office to complete his regeneration of the nation, he particularly anticipates — as he told then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev months ago -- “more flexibility” if he wins in November.

Of course, with no more elections to worry about, he’ll enjoy more flexibility as commander in chief over the Constitution. As he already has: American citizens can be indefinitely imprisoned by the military and also can be target-killed by CIA drones without going before a judge.

If former Gov. Mitt Romney moves into the Oval Office, what changes will begin to revive our rule of law? As I’ve reported, I found nothing in his record in public office or during his campaign for the presidency that reveals any concern for George W. Bush and Dick Cheney’s “dark side” or Obama’s much more dark, deep erasure of our personal constitutional liberties.

But in a Sept. 5 New York Times editorial on Attorney General Eric Holder’s announcement “that no one would be prosecuted for the brutal deaths of two prisoners held in CIA custody,” we suddenly learn that “during the Republican primary campaign, Mitt Romney expressed support for the use of waterboarding as a counterterrorism method, and even denied it amounts to torture” (“No Penalty for Torture”).

Recently Human Rights Watch reported that “it has uncovered evidence of a wider use of waterboarding than previously acknowledged by the CIA, in a report detailing brutal treatment of detainees at U.S.-run lockups abroad after the 9/11 attacks” (“Rights Watch: Evidence of wider US waterboarding,” Lee Keath, The Associated Press, Sept. 6).

This is yet further documentation of Obama’s determination, since taking presidential office, to deny any independent investigations of U.S. violations of American laws (the anti-torture statute, the War Crimes Act) and international treaties we’ve signed (Common Article 3 of the

Geneva Conventions and the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment; the latter ratified by the Senate in 1994).

The 154-page Human Rights Watch report says 14 Libyan dissenters were held in American detention centers in Afghanistan or in CIA renditions, to be tortured in Pakistan, Morocco and other nations known for their abuse of their prisoners.

But whether Romney or Obama is our next president, we can be sure there will not be any meaningful independent accountability permitted by either administration for these horrors committed in our name.

We are losing our identity and freedoms as a nation unless the new generation penetratingly learns who they are. More of them are becoming active in civics classes involving what is happening in their communities and their nation. But will there be enough authentic Americans soon enough?

As for the November elections, sure there are other vitally important issues. But who is there to vote for on who and what we are becoming? Will there ever be a candidate who recognizes and cares about how much of our identity we're losing just about every day?